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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000439

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SUBJECT: UN SECGEN REPRESENTATIVE UPBEAT ON GOAJ'S
TREATMENT OF IDPS

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On April 5, UN Secretary General Representative Walter Kalin briefed the diplomatic corps at the end of his fact-finding mission on IDP conditions in Azerbaijan. Kalin was impressed by the GOAJ's efforts to address its IDP problem, especially its construction of suitable permanent housing. The GOAJ has pledged to close all existing IDP tent camps by the end of 2007, but Kalin estimates this will not happen until mid-2008. While Kalin and the diplomatic corps agreed that the GOAJ has begun to take its IDP problem seriously in recent years, challenges remain, including limited economic opportunities and the IDPs' limited integration into Azerbaijani society. Kalin said a survey of the IDPs, needs should be conducted but the GOAJ has opposed this idea in the past. Kalin also noted that a settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict would require a repatriation plan (which UNCHR and ICRC have quietly been working on with the GOAJ) and an increased commitment from the international community. Participants agreed that demining efforts must be a key element in any resettlement plan. End Summary.

Impressed by GOAJ Efforts

¶2. (SBU) At an April 5 briefing for the diplomatic corps, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for IDPs Walter Kalin said he was "quite favorably impressed" by recent GOAJ steps to address its IDP problem, and that he did not intend to "beat up" the GOAJ. During his visit, he observed that the GOAJ has a "sense of being responsible" for this challenge, and that its commitment toward IDP issues is "not just at the rhetorical level." Kalin noted that though living conditions are difficult for IDPs, the government offers them free education and provides a range of assistance, including food subsidies and free housing. Participants agreed that in the last several years, the GOAJ has become more serious about addressing its IDP problem. According to the British Ambassador, there was a "sea change" in 2004, when the GOAJ abandoned the idea that keeping the IDPs unsettled could advance the GOAJ's political goals.

¶3. (SBU) On housing, Kalin said that the GOAJ's new settlements for IDPs are "impressive," with good infrastructure, hospitals and other facilities. The GOAJ hopes to close existing IDP tent camps by the end of 2007, but this probably will not occur until mid-2008, according to Kalin.

Lingering Challenges

¶4. (SBU) Despite the GOAJ's progress, Kalin said there are major outstanding challenges. Especially in rural areas, there is limited or no access to jobs, and the GOAJ's free assistance could foster a pattern of dependency among IDP recipients. IDP settlements are often located far from population settlements, which compounds the difficulty of IDPs securing a livelihood and reintegrating into society. Kalin commented that the GOAJ should develop greater economic opportunities for IDPs to encourage self-sufficiency. Kalin remarked that while IDPs' current economic situation is not dire, their plight would rapidly worsen if the GOAJ cut off aid.

¶5. (SBU) Kalin said an IDP survey needs to be conducted to understand IDPs' situation and needs, but the GOAJ currently does not favor such a survey. Kalin estimated that mental health and domestic violence probably were large problems among IDPs. Kalin also suggested enhanced outreach efforts to IDPs to understand their needs. The UN Resident Coordinator said the World Bank and UNDP conducted a study in 2002, but the GOAJ did not like the results.

¶6. (SBU) Kalin suggested the international community's aid should focus on technical and monitoring assistance, as well as encouraging continued attention from the GOAJ toward its IDP problem. Given Azerbaijan's growing energy wealth, the need for financial aid from the international community is limited. A representative from the Norwegian Refugee Council -- an NGO that has been heavily involved with IDP issues in Azerbaijan -- said the organization will be leaving Azerbaijan because of limited funding and was concerned that

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other NGOs dealing with IDP issues also will depart in the future. The Ambassador noted that the USG has been pushing the GOAJ to move toward a cost-sharing assistance model, and perhaps the GOAJ could support some of the relevant NGOs in accordance with this paradigm. Participants agreed that these NGOs will need to play a key role in providing technical assistance to the GOAJ for some time.

NK Settlement Would Require International Involvement

¶7. (C) Kalin said the GOAJ has started to prepare a return plan if the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict is solved. Numerous difficulties would have to be addressed, however, particularly if there was a sudden solution to the conflict. (NOTE: UNHCR and ICRC have been working with the GOAJ to develop a repatriation plan; more details septel.)

¶8. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that demining efforts in NK and the occupied territories would be a key challenge. Kalin agreed, noting that it would take a long time to locate mines and provide this information to those seeking to return to their homes in NK or the occupied territories. Kalin also said the GOAJ needs to lower public expectations that IDPs could return quickly to their homes. The British Ambassador also concurred, stating that the GOAJ's limited administrative capacity would require large-scale involvement by the international community to assist in any potential NK resettlement. All participants agreed that demining efforts would pose a serious challenge for the eventual return of peoples to NK and the occupied territories.

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